7 STEPS TO A WATER-WISE LANDSCAPE

In Fresno's hot, dry climate, it is increasingly important to create gardens and landscapes that are water-wise. Up to 70% of water use is outside the home, and much of that water is wasted due to over-watering and other careless habits, poor planning and inappropriate plant selection. Beauty and function don't have to be sacrificed in order to have a water-wise landscape. Here are seven steps that can help you create a Central Valley water-wise friendly garden:

1. Planning and design
2. Soil analysis and improvement
3. Practical turf areas
4. Appropriate plant selection
5. Efficient irrigation
6. Use of mulches
7. Appropriate maintenance

If you want to know which plants help conserve water for your garden, contact us for a free brochure on "Creating a Fresno- Friendly Garden." The brochure includes a list of flowers and plants that flourish in Fresno's climate and require little water. Also request, "What You Should Know Before You Mow," written in English, Spanish and Hmong for all landscapers and gardeners.

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CREATING A WATER-WISE LANDSCAPE

SEVEN STEPS TO FOLLOW *for our climate*

Step 1: Planning and design

You may get a better perspective on your garden if you take a few minutes to draw it on paper. Measure the yard and transfer the measurements to graph paper, plotting the permanent features, i.e., hardscape, sidewalk, driveway, pool, trees, and the plants that you want to keep. Then try to envision how you want to use your yard and what you want it to look like. Advice from a professional landscape architect, designer or nursery can come in handy, as these folks are familiar with local plant materials, soil conditions and general design principles.

Step 2: Soil analysis and improvement

Soils in the Central Valley range from sand to clay, so it's important to know what kind of soil your plants will be growing in. Soil analysis is critical to optimize the soil's water-holding capacity, yet provide good drainage. Organic amendments like compost benefit most soils.

Step 3: Practical turf areas:

Shrink the Lawn!

Across the West, lawns are the number one consumer of residential water outdoors. Reducing their size, restricting them to spaces where you actually need them (like kids' or pets' play areas), or eliminating non-recreational lawn altogether are the most effective ways to reduce your own outdoor water use.

Step 4: Appropriate plant selection

Choose natives and/or plants from climates that are similar to the West's dry areas. Shrubs, trees, perennials, and grasses from other dry regions like Australia, the Mediterranean, and South Africa are good choices. Group plants with similar water needs into hydrozones: regular (basil, strawberries), moderate (grapevines, rosemary), and low (native grasses). Use separate valves to give each hydrozone the water it needs – and no more.

Schedule irrigation wisely.

Water early in the morning (before 6AM) when the air is calm and temperatures are cool. Go to www.fresnowater.org for the current outdoor watering schedule.

Step 5: Efficient irrigation

With common watering practices, a large portion of the water applied to lawns and garden beds is not absorbed by the plants. It is lost through evaporation or runoff, or is pushed beyond the root zone because it is applied too quickly or in excess of the plants' needs. The goal of efficient irrigation is to reduce these losses by applying only as much water as is needed to keep your plants healthy.

When your landscape is fairly dry to a depth of 1-2", water it well, soaking the soil to a depth of 6-8". This will promote deep root growth, making your lawn and other plants more drought tolerant.

Step 6: Mulch and Compost

Mulch saves water by cooling the soil, reducing evaporation, and suppressing weed growth which robs desired plants of needed water. Mulch can be inorganic (pebbles, weed block, plastic) or organic (leaves, wood chips). Organic mulches add nutrients to the soil and improve drainage. Since organic mulch breaks down, it will periodically need to be reapplied to a depth of 2-4" to maximize the benefits. Compost is a soil amendment that can be incorporated into the soil to improve drainage in clay/compacted soils or increase waterholding capacity in sandy soils.

Last BUT FAR FROM LEAST ...

Step 7: Appropriate maintenance

Appropriate maintenance is critical once the other water-saving steps are in place. Reduce the amount of fertilizer applied, particularly during dry periods, and only use organic or slow-release fertilizers. Minimize summer pruning that encourages new, succulent growth, which has a high demand for water.

Grasscycling, the practice of leaving grass clippings on the turf area instead of bagging them, adds moisture and nutrients back to the turf and conserves moisture by acting as a mulch at the base of the grass blades.